

- Help teens find avenues to express their grief. Some people like to journal, others prefer art, dance, music, or physical activity to release stress. It's important that each person be allowed to find what works for him or her.
- Encourage their participation in support groups where they have the opportunity to share with others their age, who may have had a similar experience.
- If you have specific concerns about your teen, or need help finding additional resources, contact your school counselor or school social worker.
- Remember, you are their model. How adults respond when someone dies has a major effect on the way young people react.

## Books for Teens

Gootman, Marilyn; *When a Friend Dies*  
Guides and validates teens with gentle advice.

Grollman, Earl; *Straight Talk About Death For Teenagers*  
A book for teens addressing coping skills and emotions.

Grollman, Earl & Johnson, Joy; *A Teenager's Book About Suicide*  
A workbook including information about the difficult teen years, facts and myths about suicide and behavior changes.

Hipp, Earl; *Help for the Hard Times*  
Talks openly about getting through grief and growing through the hard times.

O'Toole, Donna; *Facing Change*  
Talks about change, support systems and positive things to do.

Traisman, Enid; *Fire In My Heart, Ice In My Veins*  
A journal for teenagers as a way to work through the grieving process.

Tyson, Janet; *The Common Threads of Teenage Grief*

Discusses struggles with grief, suggestions from grieving teens and commonly asked questions.

Wolfelt, Alan; *Healing Your Grieving Heart for Teens*

Practical ideas and simple tips to understand this experience.

\*For a more complete list of resources visit [www.centering.org](http://www.centering.org)

## BOOKS FOR PARENTS

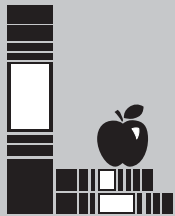
Dougy Center; *Helping Teens Cope with Death*  
Helpful information on teen reactions to death and how adults can help.

Center for Grieving Children; *Supporting Children and Teens Through Grief and Loss*  
Includes supporting grief, what to do and taking care of yourself.

Wolfelt, Alan; *Healing A Teen's Grieving Heart*  
Practical ideas for helping teens grieve.

Wolfelt, Alan; *Understanding Grief*  
Information and affirmation in understanding grief.

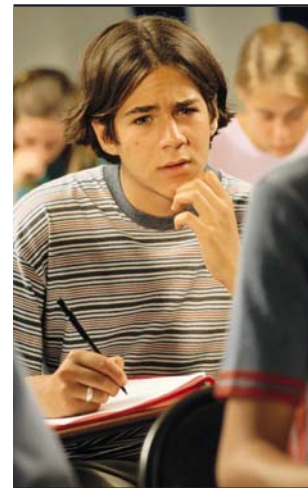
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# HELPING TEENS WITH GRIEF



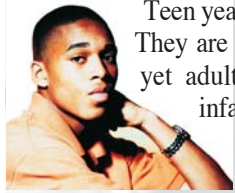
Adults who are willing to listen and provide a safe place for teens to explore their multitude of feelings help them begin to heal.

*There are no magic "right" words to say. It's the trying, the sharing and the caring-the wanting to help and the willingness to listen that says "I care about you". When we know that we do care about each other, then, together, we can talk about even the most difficult things and cope with even the most difficult times.*

-Hedda Bluestone Sharapan

Crisis Response Team  
Lincoln Public Schools

## Understanding the Grieving Teen



Teen years can be naturally difficult. They are no longer children, but not yet adults. With the exception of infancy, there is no other period of development so filled with change. During these years, teens naturally begin distancing themselves from family as a way to develop their own independence and identity. This can be interpreted as not needing or wanting support, yet during times of grief, teens need to be surrounded by caring and understanding people to help them begin the healing process.

While it's natural for teens to seek support from their peers, many of their friends may be inexperienced with this issue and won't have the ability to be supportive in the most helpful manner.

Young people often receive mixed messages regarding grief. They are told to be strong, to carry on, and even sometimes told "now you're the man/woman of the family". These expectations may prevent teens from expressing their own feelings of loss and seeking comfort from others.

Teens commonly think of themselves as immortal and immune to danger or harm. When death occurs it may push teens to test this belief by experimenting with high risk behaviors. Each person is unique. Responses to grief will vary from teen to teen. The important element is to have a caring adult to support them in this difficult time.

## DEALING WITH TRAUMA

- Trauma alters the sense of safety and predictability that young people need to feel secure in the world. This increases the need to discuss their safety concerns and re-establish a sense of normalcy.

- Trauma can occur even when there is not a personal connection to those directly involved in the situation.
- Witnessing an accident, surviving an incident where others have died, homicides and suicides are also forms of trauma.
- It is most helpful to have the opportunity to process the experience and feelings as soon after the event as possible.
- The trauma must be addressed before the healing process may begin.
- If the traumatic incident is highly covered in the media, it is important that teens have the opportunity to discuss their thoughts, feelings and interpretations.
- Teens often turn to each other for support and cling together in their grief. This is normal but it does not preclude the need for adult supervision to insure that they make healthy choices about how to handle their strong emotions.

## HOW TEENS GRIEVE

- Reactions such as stomachaches, headaches, sleep disturbance, nightmares and the inability to concentrate or focus are physical ways the body responds to death.
- A lack of questions or showing of emotions does not mean the teen is not grieving. Numbness serves as an opportunity for their emotions to catch up with what their mind is being told.
- Reactions differ depending on their level of emotional development, their relationship to the deceased, the information they receive concerning death, and their past experiences with death.
- Even if your young person did not have a close relationship with the person who died, death can often trigger feelings from other losses. These feelings can be just as strong and need to be supported.

- Young people are protective of those they care about and feel responsible for causing their emotions. Explaining to them that they are not the cause of that emotion is important.
- Expression of emotions, especially anger is very common in teens. Providing safe opportunities for them to express feelings without being judged or punished is important.
- Teens may engage in behaviors such as not communicating, not eating, skipping school, not doing homework, alcohol or drug use, acting out sexually, or reckless driving.
- It is common for young people to re-grieve a death when they reach a new stage of development. Anniversaries and significant events in their life may cause their grief to resurface.

## A CARING ADULT'S ROLE

- Adults need to be aware of their own feelings and ways of coping with death. Those able to confront, explore and learn from their own experiences are then able to help young people develop healthy attitudes as well.
- Teens need to be surrounded by loving, supportive and accepting adults who will listen to them and encourage them to express their questions, thoughts and feelings. This will require extra time.
- Trying to shield a teen from the pain of grief may exclude him/her from what can be a healing experience. Allow them to make choices about how they might be included in rituals, such as funerals, viewings and burials. Prepare young people for what they might experience.
- Try to provide as much consistency and routine as possible. Teens may test the limits and need to see that the same rules and consequences are enforced. This provides a sense of security that is important.